

Tapes: 020

## **Interview with Ron Hofman**

Conducted by Jim Muhn

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## INTERVIEW WITH RON HOFMAN

This is an interview with Ron Hofman on April 24, 1990. It's with Jim Muhn, Land Law Historian at the Service Center in Denver, Colorado. This is redoing the first part of an interview that I had done earlier with Mr. Hofman along with Hans Stuart back in 1988. [The first part of the initial interview in 1988 was never recorded].

Muhn: The first question that I have for you is, just give us a quick biographical sketch, what you were educated in, where you went to college, and then quickly your career with the Bureau of Land Management.

Hofman: O.K. Starting with my education, I started out in a Liberal Arts Program and was interested in Psychology and very soon learned that I liked to get out into nature and enjoy nature, and I had several jobs working with a logging company and decided that I wanted to make Forestry a career, so I left the Liberal Arts Program and went to the New York State Ranger School which is part of Syracuse University, graduated from there, and was in the military during the Korean War. When I got out of the Army, I went to Colorado State University and finished up a Forestry degree. I started with BLM in the summer of 1957 working on timber inventory as a temporary, and I graduated from Colorado State in December of 1957 and started with BLM in the old Denver District in 1958, in January, still working on timber inventory. Later on, when I was in the Washington Office, the BLM agreed to let me have a year off and sent me to the University of Virginia, where I got a Master's Degree in Public Administration. So that's sort of my educational background.

I started, as I said, in the old Denver District as a temporary working on timber inventory and then came on the beginning of '58 as a Forestry technician and continued working on timber inventory, and those were the days when the Bureau had just decided to move the Forestry Program out of Western Oregon to the Public Domain states, and so they created the PD Forestry Program at that time, and that's what I was hired into. One of the first jobs in PD Forestry was to inventory the forest

resources. So, my job was working in Forest Inventory and putting up some timber sales and the very beginnings of the Forestry Program in the PD states. I remember one incident when I was working in the old Denver District, part of my orientation was to work in other programs, and went up to check on a mining claim up near Blackhawk, Colorado and it was a doctor from Denver who was building a weekend cabin on a mining claim, and I went up there to check that out and got a Minerals Examiner to go with me, and there was a caretaker on that mining claim who went down to the sandbar in the creek and panned some gold and showed us the colors and clearly there was gold in the creek, which was one of the most famous mining districts in Colorado, so you could expect there was gold there. And so, we sent in a report indicating that the Bureau ought to try and remove this cabin and there was really no mining activity going on and we got a letter from the State Director at that time saying that it wasn't in the Bureau's interest to interfere with legitimate mining, so I learned at an early point in my career the full impact of the mining law in BLM's business.

I was in the Denver District working a Forestry Program until 1961 and then went to Durango, where I was the District Forester. This was when Durango was a district, and we developed in Durango a pretty substantial timber program, especially a major reforestation program, and I guess that's when I really realized that there was a wide variety of things that the Bureau could do in forestry, including--we had a lot of firewood sales and fencepost sales and Christmas tree sales, and we had people coming for Christmas trees all the way from Los Angeles, and we hired native Americans to collect cones and extract seeds that we sent up to the nursery in Fort Collins. So, we had what I considered to be a pretty diversified timber program, forestry Program.

That's when I realized that the Bureau really ought to be looking at a comprehensive forest land management program and deal with forest ecosystems and not just focus on allowable cuts, which was sort of the ONC mentality that had pushed over into the PD Forestry Program and to some extent still exists today.

I was in Durango from 1961 until 1965 and I was asked to go back

to Washington on a detail to the old Program Management Division in Washington, run by Ed Seidlitz at the time, and I was asked to come back and do some analysis for them on reforestation in the Public Domain states mainly because of the large reforestation program we had developed in the District there which was very successful. After I got done with that assignment (I was supposed to have a month and I did that in two weeks), I was asked to go up to the Budget Shop for another assignment to finish out my month's detail, and in the Budget Shop I was asked to do an analysis of the whole PD Forestry Program in terms of its cost effectiveness, and that gave me a chance to tie into the actual effectiveness of the total forest land ecosystem, as opposed to just a timber sale program. That was very interesting, and as a result of that, the Budget Officer at the time asked me to come back to Washington permanently and work in Budget on Forestry and Fire and some of the other related programs of the Bureau.

I worked in the Budget Shop from 1965 until 1967. Those were the days when McNamara was Secretary of Defense and started the old Planning Programming Budgeting Programs called PPBS and that was so effective in the Defense Department that it was transported over to the civilian agencies, and I was the Bureau's representative for PPBS and went to Defense Department school and tried to implement that program in the Bureau. The basis of that effort was to not just look at what we were doing and what it cost but to go back and really concentrate on why we were doing what we were doing. In 1967 I decided that with a Forestry Degree and working in Budget it was useful from the technical standpoint, but there were a lot of other public administration skills that I really needed and submitted a proposal to the Bureau to send me to the University of Virginia for a year to get a Master's Degree in Public Administration, and the Bureau agreed to that and I went down there and got into their Public Administration Program.

In the late 60's there was a great amount of interest and concern about environmental issues, particularly water quality and air quality and the impacts of chemicals on the environment, and it was really the first beginnings of the environmental movement. So, a good bit of the work I did at the University of Virginia was look at the impacts of industry and business and in

terms of impacts on the environment. So, when I came back to the Bureau in 1968, I had a pretty decent background in environmental issues, and when Congress passed the National Environmental Policy Act in 1970, I was really in a position to understand it. But in 1969, I moved from the Budget Shop over to the Division of Planning and Bob Jones was the Division Chief. Soon after I got there, Bob Jones went to the University of Wisconsin for a year, and when the Environmental Policy Act passed on the last day, I think it was in 1969, I was given the assignment by Irving Senzel to help the Bureau implement the National Environmental Policy Act. So, Irving Senzel made me the Division Chief while Bob was away and gave me that assignment and we became the Division of Planning and Environmental Coordination and started off on implementing NEPA in BLM.

That program was very interesting, and as a matter of fact, it's sort of ironic that we're sitting here today on April 24<sup>th</sup>, two days after Earth Day 1990 talking about Earth Day 1970. But there was a lot of concern about the environment and a lot of concern about the Natural Resources agencies and their impact on the environment. We started several efforts to respond to NEPA and one was, of course, writing policies and procedures for dealing with Environmental Assessments, and doing Environmental Impact Statements. We started an effort on Environmental Education and, of course, the review of Environmental Impact Statements written by other agencies. Of course, in the beginning there was so much confusion about NEPA and what it meant. We were sort of developing our own policy as we went. I think back in those days the Bureau was really sort of a leader in developing policies and procedures for doing Environmental Assessments and writing Environmental Impact Statements. I guess I was really most pleased with our efforts in Environmental Education. There really wasn't any money for Environmental Education in our Budget, but we were able to get several progressive-thinking District Managers to set up Environmental Education areas in their Districts and encourage school children and even Senior Citizens to come and learn about the influence of public lands and what the Bureau does on public lands and local communities. That was pretty effective publicity for BLM and BLM's efforts. Of course, the policies and procedures for Environmental Assessments--I like to think

that BLM had a major influence on, in fact, national policy on environmental assessment work.

There was a staffer at the Council on Environmental Quality who was a friend of mine, and we used to have lunch once a week and sit in Lafayette Park and talk about policies and procedures for implementing NEPA, and the whole idea of looking at not just major actions which might impact the environment, but looking at all actions and really assessing these impacts not just in formal Environmental Impact Statements, but in a general ecosystem context.

Also, we were instrumental in developing what we call the interdisciplinary approach to Environmental Impact Statements and Assessments and decision-making where rather than just have people from different disciplines look at things unilaterally, we kept them together and looked at the interactions and interdependencies of impacts and came out the other end with decisions that really looked at all considerations, not just considerations one at a time. And, of course, that concept fits right in with what the Bureau attempts to do on multiple-use management anyway. In a lot of ways, the Bureau was receptive to looking at environmental issues because of our backgrounds in biology and biological-related fields like range management, forest management, and wildlife. But it took doing to get people to see the value of the inter-disciplinary approach and look at indirect impacts and secondary impacts and things like that. So, on the one hand people were receptive; on the other hand, there was sort of an attitude, well, we're all environmentalists now and that's what our business is anyway. The other thing that I think NEPA did in the Bureau and maybe we were instrumental in doing was really to look at natural ecosystems as systems, rather than individual programs. I think that's really useful. For example, rangeland ecosystems when you look at the impact of grazing and the need for soil considerations and water runoff and wildlife and all the other things that take place on rangelands, they're all important and you need to look at them all together, not just look at individual programs. So, I think NEPA was useful to the Bureau and helped the Bureau look at things in different ways and better ways. The downside of NEPA is that it sort of turned into a legal playground, and rather than use it as a positive

mechanism to get people to look at environmental issues, it soon became a negative influence and some of that even continues today.

So that hopefully brings us up to fill in the gap that was in the tape before.

Muhn: Can I ask you some more questions?

Hofman: Sure.

Muhn: Going back to when you first started with the Bureau; that was the time of the Eisenhower administration and Woosley was Director of the Bureau of Land Management and from the way you talked I assume we could say that most of your work at that time in terms of doing inventory work was for allowable cuts of timber. You were mainly reacting, I assume, to requests from the private sector for this timber and the Bureau wasn't really doing it on their own initiative?

Hofman: I think the emphasis during those times for BLM was to meet the needs of the traditional users on the public lands--ranchers and timber people and mining people. That was the policy and the attitude--that we were in business to supply goods and services to meet customer demands. My little story about the mining incident, I think, was indicative of that policy.

Muhn: Right. Once in a previous conversation you talked about even though we didn't have a recreation policy per se in the Bureau when you first came on in your office you did take the initiative to provide some recreational facilities on BLM lands?

Hofman: Yeah. I think even though we didn't have FLPMA at that time that the education most of us got as foresters--in my

own case--recognized that public lands were there because people had a right to enjoy them in many ways, not just as commodities coming off the public lands, but also for things like recreation, so even though we didn't have a strong recreation program or recreation money in the Bureau at that time, a lot of us saw the need to provide opportunities for people. Or even protect areas that were receiving heavy use by people. So, on our own, we did a lot of things which I guess you could call multiple use before we even had that mandate. Things like putting in picnic tables and fireplaces.

Muhn:       Going up real quick, when you were in the Durango District, what kind of impact did the Classification and Multiple Use Act have? You were there just as it was passed. You were about ready to leave. Did you see any impact per se on the work that you were doing at that time, or it really wasn't implemented till after you were gone?

Hofman:     I think that the main impact it had internally and externally, it sent a real signal that for the first time the Bureau of Land Management might be positioning itself to retain and manage lands. Up until that time as we had said, it was BLM lands were looked at as commodities that the land itself and the resources on them were looked at as commodities which were there to be exploited and used by commercial interests and businesses or given to communities for whatever purpose, so we were sort of viewed from externally as land brokers and resource brokers. We were there to offer up commodities and sort of be at the mercy of our customers. But the Classification and Multiple Use Act sent a signal that says, well, there may be some of these lands that should be retained and managed and the Act provided us a mechanism to put these lands in categories for disposal or retention, or I guess we had another category called "Other," which meant some further study. But it was really helpful because it was hard to argue, for example, when a State Fish and Game organization wanted to take some of our land, and we said, well, we can manage that land and they said, well, you don't have any authority to manage it, and it can be disposed of or turned over to interests which are harmful to wildlife at any time. And you couldn't argue against that, even though we felt



as professional resource managers that the Bureau ought to be retaining and managing those lands in the public interest. So, the Classification and Multiple Use Act sent a good signal and people in the Bureau were excited about it for the first time, being able to retain and do what we felt was our job for management.

Muhn: O.K. This is the last question I'm going to ask you, since the tape is starting to run out. Through your career, if you want to answer this question--tell me things that you think, from when you began to now, How has the Bureau improved and then the second part of the question is, Where has the Bureau gone astray in your opinion? You may just want to stick with the positive.

Hofman: Well, I've been in the Bureau for over 30 years, and I've seen it move from an agency that was sort of without a Multiple-Use mandate, at the mercy of special interest groups. I've seen the Bureau move from that to an agency that has a Multiple-Use mandate, and is able to deal with all the publics in pretty effective ways, not to say that politics don't enter into what the Bureau does. Politics enters into what all Federal agencies do; but I've seen our work force increase; I've seen our budget increase; I've seen our programs increase; and I think today we're probably the only real multiple-use management agency in the country. I think the National Environmental Policy Act did a lot of good in terms of the Bureau looking at ecosystem management instead of single purpose management.

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So, I think the Bureau's come a long way. I think our status and stature have really increased tremendously with outside interest groups and state and local agencies, other Federal agencies. I think we can stand up there with the Forest Service and be proud of what we do.

In terms of where the Bureau's gone wrong, or where it might go in the future that might be productive, I really think that the Bureau is in the business of conflict resolution, and I really think that multiple use is not some words written on a litter

bag or the Bureau's Mission Statement. I really think that multiple use is the product of a consensus-building effort, or should be the product of a consensus-building effort where all the interests get together and work out solutions to problems and it's kind of like a pluralistic philosophy in a way, but if you look at the successes that the Bureau's had in the stewardship program where we took people out on the grounds and represented totally divergent points of view on grazing allotments and actually worked out solutions to those problems on the ground with those people and then those people became defenders and supporters and owners of those decisions and were able to defend them in the political process.

Another example is the Arizona Wilderness Bill. The Bureau has been spending millions of dollars going through a process where BLM identifies what it thinks is suitable for wilderness and then would submit that up to the Department and Congress and the President, when in fact the real decisions on wilderness come through the political process and the legislative process and what happened in Arizona was--all the interests got together and decided what was really appropriate for wilderness and what wasn't, and BLM participated and agreed with that and legislation was passed which put it in place. So, I think rather than the sort of linear in-house efforts to get things done, we ought to broaden our approach to multiple-use management into more of a consensus-building effort and train our managers to become adept at working with publics to facilitate solutions that will really stick. And I think if we don't do that, what will happen is, we will have more and more single interest groups determine what we do--the groups with the money, the groups with the political clout, the groups with the best lawyers--will start even more and more forcing the Bureau to make decisions based on what their interests are rather than what the total public interest really is. So I think what we've seen is that we've got more and more special interest groups, they're more and more fragmented, they're becoming more and more powerful, they're becoming more and more sophisticated, and they have more and more tools at hand to force the Bureau to do things, and if the Bureau doesn't find ways to bring all of these interests together and work with all of them and become sort of a leader in facilitation, then a lot of the decision-making options are going to be taken away from BLM and BLM will

sort of return to the days when it was the pawn of special interests, and we may again become the pawn of special interests if the Bureau doesn't get out in front. And I think we could do it if we adopted this philosophy of consensus-building and became skilled in consensus-building processes. We saw that happen successfully in the early days of the California Desert Plan where we forged a coalition and built the strong coalition which supported the California Desert Plan, and that Plan was endorsed by those interests that we signed off on by the Andrus administration, it was signed off by the Watt administration just a few months later, and it put in place a coalition-backed plan. Of course, the coalition didn't hold together, and it takes a lot of energy and a lot of skill to hold those coalitions together, and the Bureau really has to want to do it in order to make it happen. But I think that's the real future for the Bureau, and if the Bureau doesn't go in that direction we could return to those early days, and I'd sure hate to see that happen.

Muhn:       O.K.   Thank you.